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## MEDIA RELEASE

# Pacific writer to pen a tale of two Samoas

First time novelist Marisa Maepu will weave the story of twins separated at birth into a tumultuous era of Samoan history, as recipient of the 2011 Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writers' Residency. The residency offers a New Zealand writer of Pacific heritage the opportunity to work for three months on a creative writing project exploring Pacific identity, culture or history at the University of Hawai'i.



2011 Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writers' Residency recipient Marisa Maepu

Marisa leaves Wellington on 14 September to take up her three month residency at the University of Hawai'i's Center for Pacific Island Studies in Honolulu. *Sala ma Sina* (the working title of Marisa's novel) follows the lives of Samoan twin sisters who are separated at birth. The girls grow up in Western Samoa, American Samoa and New Zealand during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period of historical significance and great social change in all three countries.

"I picked this era to set the novel because it was such a dynamic, and at times unsettled, period of Samoan history which I thought would make a compelling backdrop to my characters' own stories," says Marisa. "I have also heard American Samoa and (Western) Samoa referred to as sisters, so I thought I could explore some interesting sororal themes between the two Samoas and the twin sisters in my novel."

A New Zealand-born Samoan, Marisa hopes the University of Hawai'i's unique status as both an American and Pacific institution will prove useful for her research. She will examine America's administration of American Samoa and its influence in the Pacific leading up to and during World War One. Her work will reference such turbulent events as the division of Samoa by Tripartite Convention in 1899, the Mau independence movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the First World War, the annexing of Western Samoa by New Zealand in 1914, and the devastating influenza epidemic of 1918.

Marisa has enjoyed solid success in her short writing career. She won a Spasifik Magazine/Huia Publishers short story competition in 2007, and was selected for publication in the New Zealand Book Month *Six Pack* anthology in 2008. She is currently finishing a collection of 15 short stories for publication, and has written a number of children's stories in the Samoan language to support teaching of the language in schools.

Marisa is the seventh recipient of the Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writers' Residency. Previous recipients have included filmmaker Sima Urale, poet Tusiata Avia, playwright Victor Rodger, children's author Sarona Aiono-Iosefa, and playwright and director Makerita Urale.

## ENDS

*Fulbright New Zealand was established in 1948 to promote mutual understanding through educational and cultural exchanges between New Zealand and the United States of America. The Fulbright programme offers a range of prestigious awards for New Zealand and American graduate students, academics, artists and professionals to study, research and teach in each other's countries. Fulbright New Zealand offers over 70 exchange awards each year – half to students and half to scholars – and more than 1,400 New Zealanders and 1,100 Americans have benefited from a Fulbright award to date. The programme is mainly funded by the US and New Zealand governments with additional funding from award sponsors, private philanthropists and alumni donors.*

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